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## Entry Nr. 024 Comba

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Aaron Spencer Fogleman and Robert Hanserd (eds.), *Five Hundred African Voices: A Catalog of Published Accounts by Africans Enslaved in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1586-1936* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2022).

<i>Catalog number:</i>	<b>24</b>
<i>Name(s) of African providing account:</i>	<b>Comba = Mama Comba = Julie</b>
<i>Date account recorded:</i>	1764
<i>Date account first published:</i>	2015
<i>Date of entry creation or last update:</i>	20 February 2022

*Source:* From p. 160-162 in VOICES OF THE ENSLAVED: LOVE, LABOR, AND LONGING IN FRENCH LOUISIANA by Sophie White. Copyright © 2019 by the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. Used by permission of the University of North Carolina Press. [www.uncpress.org](http://www.uncpress.org).

*Sophie White Comments:*

p. 160:

“The court records are sprinkled with incidental references to courtships that were lubricated by means of gift giving by men to women, often accompanied by food preparation by women for men. This connection between men offering gifts to women, who in turn offered comfort and sustenance The court records are sprinkled with incidental references to courtships that were lubricated by means of gift giving by men to women, often accompanied by food preparation by women for men. This connection between men offering gifts to women, who in turn offered comfort and sustenance

p. 161:

to men, is apparent in the earliest known reference to gumbo (*gombeau*) in the archival record. In 1764, the runaway Louis [see Catalog entry 27] was asked to confirm “if the *negresse* Comba had not served gumbo to him and another *negresse*, and if he had not slept with her” (*si La negresse Comba ne Luy avoit pas donné un Gombeau avec une autre Negresse, et sil navoit pas Couché avec elle*). He replied that it was false that he slept with her but acknowledged “that he ate with her from the time that her husband lived and before he had gone up to the Illinois Country, but since he has come back he has not set foot there” (*qu’il mangeoit chez elle du tems que son mari vivoit et avant quil ne monta aux illinois mais que depuis qu’il est dessendu il n’y a pas mis Le pied*). Where Louis denied having recently been to see Mama Comba, however, his companion and fellow runaway Cézar confirmed that Louis always slept at her place, adding that she had even told her overseer that “he was a *negre* from the upper area [the Illinois Country] who is of my country” (*cet un negre de La haut qui est de mon pais*). (Mama Comba was Mandinga; therefore, Louis originated there, too).

The back-and-forth continued during the formal confrontation between C  zar and Mama Comba, with C  zar underlining that Louis not only slept at her place but slept *with* her, and often (*qu'il avoit couch   souvent chez elle et avec elle*). When Mama Comba finally acknowledged her relationship with Louis, she could not resist highlighting Louis's failings in proper gift-giving etiquette:

*Text of Account:*

Original French –

p. 161:

“ladite comba a dit que cela etait vrai, quelle luy avoit m  me donn   un gommeau avec une autre negresse et a avou   que le dit Louis couchoit avec elle et la negresse luy a soutenu aussi qu'elle n'avoit jamais rien re  u dudit negre Louis qu'une seule carotte de tabac, laquelle carotte il luy avoit repris pour la fumer .... Luy a encore soutenu que ce Louis ne fezoit pas comme luy, qui

p. 162:

alloit voir toujours sa Maitresse qui est La negresse marianne au sr Caill   et quil Luy donoit hardes Jupes et tout Ce quil vouloit et quil La voyoit toujours dans le Jardin de Contrelle et par tous ailleurs”

English translation –

p. 161:

“The said Comba said that that was true, that she had even served gumbo to him and another negresse and admitted that the said Louis slept with her, and the said negresse [Mama Comba] also maintained that she had never received anything from the said negre Louis, only a carrot of tobacco, which carrot he had taken back to smoke.... She also maintained that this Louis was not like him [C  zar], who always went to see his mistress, who is the negresse Marianne belonging to Sr. Caill   to whom he gave apparel, skirts, and everything he stole and whom he always went to see in Cantrelle's garden and other places.”

*Sophie White Comments:*

Comba's response “set up a contrast between her own relationship with Louis and that of C  zar and Marianne, a twenty-eight-year old who self-identified as being from Guinea and acknowledged C  zar as “her suitor” (*son galand*). If C  zar and Marianne's romance was facilitated by the exchange of food for gifts, Mama Comba and Louis's faltered on the rocks of

unmet expectations. As Mama Comba was at pains to explain with her barbed reference to Louis's not giving her anything but tobacco, her suitor had failed to uphold his end of the bargain and added insult to injury when he took back the tobacco he had given her so that he could smoke it himself."

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